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The Immutability of God,
AND
The Trials of Christ's Ministry;

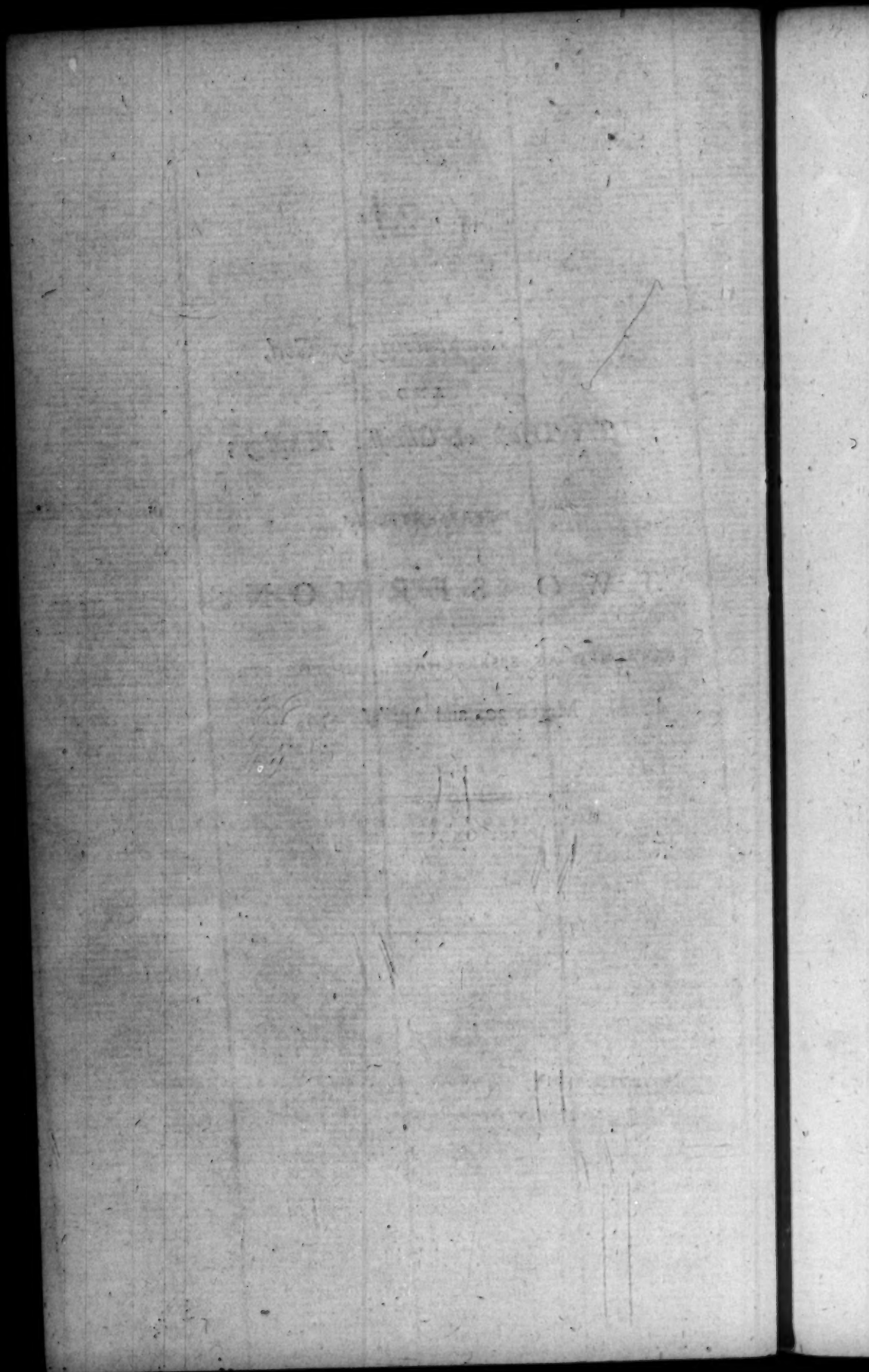
REPRESENTED IN

TWO SERMONS,

PREACHED AT ESSEX CHAPEL, IN THE STRAND,

March 30, and April 6, 1794.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]



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AND
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March 30, and April 6, 1794.

BY

JOSHUA TOULMIN, A.M.

PUBLISHED AT EARNEST REQUEST,

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The Ministry of God

AND

The Word of God

REPRINTED IN

TWO SERMONS

PREACHED AT THE CHURCH IN THE STATION

ON THE 10th OF APRIL 1794

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JOHN TOLMIN A.M.

MINISTER OF THE CHURCH



PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE impression made by Pulpit Discourses, is often more owing to the circumstances under which they are delivered, than to the excellencies of composition, or even to the justness and importance of the sentiments they conveyed. To this, the Author conceives, must be imputed the acceptance with which the following Discourses were favoured, and the earnest and repeated desire of their publication.

The first obviously applied to the changes which are taking place in the world; and which do, and will, draw after them a change in the situation, views, and connexions, of many individuals.

The second was delivered before the great and excellent Dr. Priestley, on the day preceding his leaving the capital of this kingdom to go a voluntary exile into America. It could not be foreseen that it would be preached in

connexion with so singular an event; yet this circumstance was evidently felt by the audience, as it was by the Preacher. But, when it was prepared for the Pulpit, some months since, the Author had in his eye, besides similar instances, the treatment which this much injured name had received, and which has at last induced him to leave his native country.

With sentiments of great respect are these Sermons inscribed to the Gentlemen who requested their appearance from the press; to the Society in Essex-street, to whom they were preached; and to its late and present worthy Pastor. The Author embraces, with pleasure, this opportunity of saying, that he reflects on it as among the most happy and honourable circumstances of his existence, that he enjoys the regard and friendship of a LINDSEY, DISNEY, and PRIESTLEY.

S E R M O N I.

MALACHI iii. 6.

For I am the LORD, I change not.

THE words of our text declare a great and solemn truth. The connexion in which they stand, points out the importance and usefulness of this truth. They form part of a prophecy, in which is predicted the coming of the Messiah, and of his forerunner, v. 1—5. And the distinction which, on the accomplishment of this event, would take place between the righteous and the wicked, is also foretold. Judgment would be executed on those who were guilty of profaneness, licentiousness, and oppression, and feared not God: and it is promised, that “the offering of Judah and Jerusalem
“should be pleasant,” or acceptable, “unto
“the Lord, as in former times.” To con-

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firm

firm the faith of the Israelites in these prophetic views, it is added, "I am the Lord, "I change not."

This is a solid ground of confidence, that the promise of God will be performed, and his word verified. Because He is not exposed to any influence which can alter his mind, or divert him from the execution of his purpose. Nor can any thing offer to weaken his power; nor can any communications exhaust his fulness.

This is a sentiment which, under the fluctuation of human affairs, and the frailty of our being, giveth a support to our faith, and an elevation to our minds. Whatever changes take place in ourselves, in our connexions, or in the world around us, the Being who made and governs us and the universe, is ever the same. "I am the "LORD, *I change not.*"

On pronouncing these words, I am naturally led to discourse of, and you to meditate on, the immutability, or the unchangeableness of God. I would

I. Open and prove to you this truth; that God is unchangeable. And

II. Assist

II. Assist your devout improvement of it, by drawing from it some suitable reflections.

I. I am to open and prove the truth declared in the text: "I am the LORD, I change not." Few and simple as are these words, there is a force and sublimity in them, that strongly affect the mind with the great idea they contain. They intimate that the name which God bears, emphatically expresseth it: "I am the LORD:" it follows, "I change not." The style used concerning the Almighty, in other places, is such as conveyeth the same sentiment: as when God himself declared to Moses, "I am that I am;" and adds, "thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, 'I AM hath sent me unto you.'" In the New Testament similar language sets it forth: "Grace be unto you, and peace from Him *who is*, and *who was*, and *who is to come*;" i. e. There is no period of time, but *He is*; the same under past ages as he is at present: and what he is at present, he will be in future, how remote soever.

Whoever reflects on what he means by the word, God, will perceive that it includes in it, the notion of a permanent duration and excellence, liable to no change or decay. This term, God, signifieth the First Cause and Maker of all things; who derived his being from none; from whom they all received their existence, and all their powers; before whom there was no other, and above whom there is no other.

What then can affect the existence, can change the nature, or alter the designs, of this supreme, original, and independent Being? 'That which dependeth upon nothing, can be acted upon by nothing—can be changed by nothing—can be influenced by no power—can be impaired by no time—can be varied by no accident*.' Nothing from without can affect him; the very perfection of his nature forbids all change from within.

Change is the consequence of weakness and frailty; of something wrong, or of something defective; or some seeds of corruption or dissolution. From every thing

* Dr. Clarke's Sermons, vol. i. p. 144. 8vo.

of this kind the infinite mind is entirely free. The excellence of his nature admits no improvement. Unerring wisdom and infinite power cannot alter for the worse. To suppose any change in him is, in a word, to suppose that the creature can controul the Creator, or that perfection can become imperfection; nay, that the highest excellence of nature can suffer the greatest degradation. 'For the greater the divine perfections are, the greater imperfection would mutability be*.'

Were it necessary, on this subject, to appeal from these clear reasonings to the opinion and testimony of thinking men, in the heathen world, we might refer to a Roman philosopher, who speaking of the immutability of the divine counsels, saith, 'The gods make unchangeable decrees, and never repent them of their first counsels†.' We might quote to you one of the Grecian sages, determining, when he lays down the fundamental laws and constitutions of Religion, First, That God is the cause of all good, and in no wise of any evil. Secondly, That God doth not de-

* Bp. Wilkins.

† Seneca.

ceive us, by making various representations of himself to us ; sometimes in one form, sometimes in another ; for he is always the same, and cannot pass out of his own idea, or be any other than what he is *."

But if we mention authority, independently of the plain conclusions of our own minds, as a ground for entertaining these sentiments of God's unchangeableness, we have a superior authority ; and our conceptions of God are, in this instance, as well as in every other, assisted and ennobled by the language of scripture. There the title of the *living God* is frequently ascribed to him ; and he swears by this, as denoting not only eternity but unchangeableness ; " As I live, saith the Lord." Though the language on this head be easy and popular, it is strong and sublime : when the Almighty is stiled, " the King immortal, who only hath immortality," i. e. who only hath it immutably and independently ; " the incorruptible God, and from everlasting to everlasting God." The divine unchangeableness is finely contrasted with the frailty and change to which all other things are

* Plato.

subject, even the frame of the heavens above, and the foundations of the earth beneath. " They shall perish, yea all of " them shall wax old like a garment ; as a " vesture shalt thou change them, and they " shall be changed : but Thou art the " same ;" the same through all generations, and beyond all generations still unchangeably the same.

This general truth is peculiarly delightful, when it branches out into the particulars which are involved in it. There is not an excellence of the divine nature to which it doth not apply ; there is not a manifestation of his providence or government over the children of men, to which it doth not also apply.

If we contemplate his righteousness, " it " is like the great mountains," steadfast and immoveable : if his truth, " it endureth " for ever : " if his wisdom, " the counsel " of the Lord standeth for ever, and the " thoughts of his heart to all generations : " if his power, " the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength : " if his goodness, " it " endureth continually." He is " the Fa-

“ther of light, from whom every good and
 “perfect gift cometh down; with whom
 “is no variableness, nor shadow of turn-
 “ing.”

The acts which flow from these perfec-
 tions, possess the same permanent nature,
 and display the same unchangeable glory.
 As to the laws he has given, “his com-
 “mandments are sure, they stand fast for
 “ever and ever;” and his gospel is “the
 “same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”
 As to his purposes, he hath declared, “My
 “counsel shall stand, I will do all my
 “pleasure.” As to his gracious promises,
 he hath proclaimed, “the gifts and calling
 “of God are without repentance;” and his
 promises in Christ Jesus “are yea and
 “amen,” sure and irrevocable. In the em-
 phatical language of the Psalmist, “He
 “will not suffer his faithfulness to fail; his
 “covenant he will not break, nor alter the
 “thing that is gone out of his lips.” And
 as to his threatenings, they are not the de-
 nunciations of malevolence, or rash anger,
 but are founded in wisdom and righteous-
 ness; the sanctions of his righteous laws,
 and

and the expressions of his irreconcilable hatred to sin. In every respect, He is “ the LORD, and changeth not.”

To all these reasonings, to all these representations of the immutability of God, it may be said, That the scriptures, even those scriptures, from whence we draw these views of his unchangeableness, describe him, as repenting and changing his purpose. Thus it is said, that when the wickedness of men was great in the earth, it repented the Lord, that he made “ man on the earth, and it grieved him at the heart ; “ that the Lord repented that he made “ Saul king over Israel ;” and that, on the reformation of the Ninevites, God “ repented of the evil that he said he would “ do unto them, and did it not.”

The answer to this objection is, that these expressions are not to be understood according to the letter. It is language used in condescension to the weakness of our apprehensions, and to assist our conceptions of the administration of Providence : which, though directed by one invariable principle of wisdom and righteousness, adapts itself
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to the circumstances of time, and the conduct of men; so that its measures apparently change, as if they flowed from hope, or grief, or resentment; as if they were dictated by human passions. These expressions “ signify not a change in God “ himself, but only a difference of the event “ with regard to us.” To use the reasoning of a great man, “ God’s affection “ towards good or evil, towards virtue or “ vice, is therefore uniform and unchange- “ able; because his promises and threaten- “ ings invariably follow those dispositions “ through all the changes of men’s per- “ sonal behaviour. Thus good parents and “ princes encourage or discourage their re- “ spective children or subjects, according as “ they change their behaviour for the bet- “ ter or worse*.” So that this language imports nothing inconsistent with the immutability of the divine nature; nothing that detracts from the perfection of his nature, or the permanence of his counsels and will. He is ever the same.

* Clarke’s Sermons, vol. i. p. 162.

This

This view of the unchangeableness of God giveth us all high and glorious thoughts of God, inspireth the good with confidence, addresseth the wicked with awful considerations, and furnisheth us with suitable sentiments to carry with us through all the revolutions of time and changes of nature. These are the uses to which I would

II. Apply this subject; and by these reflections, assist you in the improvement of it.

1. This subject leads us to entertain high and glorious thoughts of God. It sheweth the fulness of perfection there is in Him. It displayeth the superiority of the great Creator to the most excellent and durable effects of his power. The time was, when they were not; and, through every period of their existence, they undergo various changes, and are subject to continual fluctuations, till the time will come, that they shall be no more.

In this lower world, *man*, in the extent and compass of his powers, in the influence of his counsels and schemes, and in the duration of his being, riseth vastly above all the creatures below him, and all the parts

of nature, with which he is surrounded : but “ all flesh is as grass, and all the glory “ of man as the flower of the grass.” He abideth not long in one state, or in one purpose ; his works of art and genius perish ; his greatness is unstable ; his honours are fading ; his name becomes extinct ; empires fall to decay, and monarchies sink into ruin ; princes die ; Kings are dethroned. .

The most stable parts of inanimate nature, the firmness of which promiseth an everlasting duration, are not exempt from change. The hills depart, and the mountains are removed ; the earth itself, fitted, adorned, and enriched as it is by the power, skill, and bounty of a divine Architect, is but a temporary edifice. All that it contains, wears, decays, and will perish ; and the whole of this wonderful fabric shall be consumed in the universal conflagration.

If from this earth you raise your eyes to the heavens, the most glorious bodies that roll above you are ever changing their appearances. Their light frequently suffers an eclipse. Their splendour is often obscured in darkness ; and their situation, with
respect

respect to our world, undergoes various alterations. ‘ The sun itself is the greatest, the most regular, the most stable and constant dispenser of light and heat and fruitful influences upon the whole face of this inferior world; yet is his influence varied by different motions, by days and nights, by winter and summer, by clouds and shadows, and by alterations within its own body *.’ Nay, the sun itself, and all that is bright and glorious in the upper regions shall change and perish: the stars shall fall from their high spheres; the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.

Amidst this constant fluctuation, amidst this universal ruin, God remaineth the same; He changeth not. He is always equally perfect, equally righteous, equally happy and glorious without variation, or shadow of turning, from age to age. Oh! supreme Majesty, how immense is thy superiority to all nature and all beings! Whatever is most permanent, compared with the incorrupti-

* Dr. Clarke.

ble, unchangeable, eternal Sovereign of heaven and earth, is but weakness and vanity. It is, O God, an elevating and noble thought, that thou art always the same. This contemplation heightens our ideas of thee, and impresseth our hearts with sentiments of admiration and wonder ! Happy are they, who are partakers in the favour of this unchangeable source of excellence and felicity. For this subject,

zdy, Inspireth the good with joyful confidence. The Being who is the object of their love and trust, is the rock of ages. You may confide in Him without suspicion ; you may hope in Him without danger of disappointment. The friend of God has, here, infinitely the advantage of the friend of princes. They must die and return to the dust. All human friendship rests upon precarious and uncertain grounds ; upon the strength of the virtuous principle, upon the stability of human attachments, upon things out of the power of the most faithful to command, upon their continued ability to help and befriend ; whether that ability ariseth from wisdom, from strength, from

from wealth, or from being within the reach of their aid and influence.

A variety of circumstances may affect, or destroy this ability. The best men are not always superior to caprice, to resentment, or to mistakes. Their views alter, and their purposes change. But nothing, like this, is to be feared from the LORD, who changeth not.

This is the consideration which God condescends to employ in the text, to support the confidence of the Israelites in his goodness. He foretells and promises events, which would be most beneficial and happy; and he invites and encourages the expectation of the accomplishment, by declaring, "I am the Lord; I change not." My compassions, my promises, are immutable. Therefore, he adds, "Ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Here is an unfailing ground of trust, rising superior, as we have observed, to all human confidence; and administering support and all possible security under all the changes which we may experience in ourselves, or in our condition.

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We may feel ourselves separated from our loving and beloved connexions, or bereaved of our friends. To the vigour of youth and the strength of manhood, may have followed the infirmities and the fears of declining years. To good fame and an honourable reputation, may have succeeded undeserved obloquy and reproach. In the room of flourishing and prosperous circumstances, may have come the day of adversity, and the straits of poverty. But still the Lord is the same : the same in himself and the same to us : supreme in power and wisdom ; the fountain of life ; our friend and Father. This reviving thought applies its soothing, animating consolations to all circumstances. Youth, and health, and riches, and friends, may fail us, but He hath declared, what should administer perpetual, unfailing, comfort, “ I am the LORD ; I change not.”

3dly, This truth addresseth the wicked with awful considerations. From whence can their hope arise ? Can they admit any secret apprehensions, that time may efface the remembrance of their sins ; or, that the
divine

divine abhorrence of them will wear out, or that his power to punish will be impaired? In no instance can such expectations answer: for He is the LORD; He changeth not.

Whether we reflect on the purity of his nature, to which iniquity is an abomination; or on the righteousness of his government, which will by no means clear the guilty; or on the omnipotence which armeth him with strength to execute judgment; what giveth a sad accent to all is, that this holy, righteous, and powerful Being continueth ever the same; will never cease to hate iniquity; will never want power to visit it; and that no length of time, no artifice, no bribe, can change his hatred towards every unrighteous action, or prevent his rendering to unrighteous men according to their deeds. This is a solemn and awful thought, which may justly alarm their minds, and fill them with fearful apprehensions of his judgments.

The scriptures, when men were not prevailed on by the denunciations of his wrath

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to forsake their sins, afford many affecting instances of the unchangeableness of his threatenings. These are warning of what the impenitent, at the retributions of the great day, have to expect from the ever-living God. “ For as his mercy is always open to the penitent, so from it the impenitent are irreversibly excluded *.”

His law is eternal truth, and his eternal power will support its honour and maintain its obligation. His nature is fixed and unalterable: how then is the opposition between his purity and our sinfulness, between his love of righteousness and our guilt to be removed; or the awful consequences of it to be prevented? By *one method only* is this to be effected; by a *change in us*, a change in our conduct and character; by a transforming and renewal of our minds to know and do the perfect and acceptable will of God. “ It is impossible that God should change: the sinner may change, and must do so, or perish †.”

* Dr. Clarke.

† Dr. Clarke.

Think not then of impossibilities : consider what may and must be done ; and without delay, with the greatest seriousness and earnestness of mind, apply thy thoughts to it, and do it.

Lastly, Let us carry the truth of the text with us through all the revolutions of time, and changes of our condition. Scarcely a year passes away, without producing some change in our circumstances ; besides taking somewhat from the length of our existence, gradually bringing about the periods of life, and hastening the approach of its last hour. Some years, we find, big with events and changes ; introducing, perhaps, an entire alteration in our plan of life, in our place of abode and circle of connexions. We can not look forward without expecting new, and probably, greater changes than we have yet seen.

Time will dissolve our nearest connexions, break the dearest ties of life, separate us from those whose presence now constitutes a principal ingredient in our felicity,

impair our strength and vigour, and change the whole scene of things around us.

If we send our thoughts abroad into the world, it is not possible for our foresight to anticipate the events, of which time, of which a few years, may be productive. Our lot has been cast into an eventful period. At the review of the transactions that have taken place within our memory, and but a few years back, the mind is astonished.

We have seen seven colonies, dependent upon this country, formed into a vast empire, greater in extent than any antient monarchy, raised on a basis of liberty unequalled by the freest states of Greece, and promising an height of glory, of which imagination can have but faint conceptions. Awful and surprising are the revolutions, which a neighbouring nation has exhibited. The fall of greatness appals us. The effusion of human blood, by the sword and by the sentence of tribunals, shocks all our feelings. We are at a loss to conceive what events time, big with the fate of nations, will soon unfold.

unfold. The mind is agitated with expectations, with fears, and with hopes. Vast interests, we apprehend, are depending. But under all our surprise at the past, the tumult of the present, and the uncertainty of the future moment, religion suggests a solid principle to calm our hearts, and to comfort them. Revelation represents the divine Being declaring, as it were by his own mouth, "I am the LORD, I change not."

Unchangeable power and wisdom, unchangeable righteousness and benevolence, govern the world. We shall not be consumed. The issue of things will be well; will be happy. Human counsels, human governments, human affairs, may change; but God changeth not. He is "without variation, or shadow of turning."

As times, and seasons, and years revolve; as empires rise and fall; as our fortune, and condition, and connexions change, look, Christians, beyond the fate of subverted empires, of princes dethroned, of human glory eclipsed, and the fluctuations of your dearest

concerns; look up to the unchangeable God; to the Being who, amidst the fluctuations of human life, and of human power and greatness, remaineth the same: "whose counsel standeth for ever, and whose righteousness is like the strong mountains." In this sentiment there is dignity. Here the human mind resteth with security. Here is ground for every good hope. Let this principle be as an anchor to the soul: and, in the strong consolations it affords, rejoice.

It is, you will recollect, an instance and a proof of this truth, that you have received a kingdom which cannot be moved; that you, christians, are heirs of "an inheritance incorruptible and unchangeable." This, as the disciples of Jesus, is the dignity of your profession and hopes. Whatever events or changes the passing year, or ensuing years, may produce, this is your happiness. Ever have recourse to this expectation, and to the truth on which it resteth. It floweth from the word, and the grace, of the immutable God; of the
Being

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Being who, in effect, saith to us, as he did to Israel of old, that whatever be the changes in the world, in the times, and in our connexions, "I am the LORD; I change not." Amen,

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the Lord; I am the Lord; I am the Lord;

S E R M O N II.

ISAIAH liii. 3.

He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not.

THE last sufferings of Christ are, very justly, a frequent subject of serious meditation and of pulpit eloquence. But the various evils to which he was exposed through his ministry, are not so closely and often considered as their nature and number deserve. It is not usual to go into the detail, or to take a full and connected view of them. They are introduced incidentally, or touched on in a general manner only. I would therefore, now, avowedly, enter on the consideration of the trials, to which
our

our Lord was exposed in the daily course of his preaching and labours, before he was apprehended in the garden, conducted to the Roman tribunals, and led to the cross. His life was marked with affliction, and many were the things he met with to vex his righteous mind.

No words, perhaps, can more pertinently, or expressively apply to the ill treatment, provocations, and dangers, that attended his public ministry, than the words that I have now read. In which the prophet, as if he lived in the days of the Messiah, and was witness of the reception which the Jews gave him, and of the afflictions that befell him, exclaims, “ He is despised and re-
 “ jected of men; a man of sorrows, and
 “ acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it
 “ were, our faces from him: He was de-
 “ spised, and we esteemed him not.”

This passage suggests the propriety of taking a survey of all those circumstances in the public ministry of Christ, which were distressing to him. They may be comprehended under the following heads; the poverty and lowness of his appearance;
 the

the calumnies and abuses which were cast upon him ; the dangers to which his life was exposed ; and the unsuccessfulness of his preaching. In each of these respects, " He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:" and that ministry, which was a series of the most important services to mankind, was a scene of severe trials to himself. It was not less distinguished by the sufferings He endured, than it was by the instructions He delivered, and the deeds He performed.

First, His poverty and low condition in life exposed Him to sufferings. Though the mother of Jesus was of the royal house of David, her family was reduced to a low state. His father was a carpenter, a mechanical employment held in no high reputation. His early life was spent in obscurity, and passed in a place, Nazareth, which was held in contempt. His youth, instead of being given to the studies of a liberal education, was spent in the difficulties of poverty, and his hands employed in the works of it ; for he was brought up to the laborious trade of his father. Under these disadvantages

disadvantages did He enter upon his ministry ; and appeared, in public life, as a person of ignoble birth, education, and connexions.

It was of the least consideration, that He was precluded from the enjoyment of many of the comforts and conveniences of life ; that no luxuries covered his table ; that no pomp of retinue attracted notice ; that no patronage of the great recommended Him to the attention of the people. The mean circumstances of his birth and family were, though unjustly, a great discredit to Him : and the evils of poverty appeared to have been felt by Him through the whole of his ministry. Not the excellence of his doctrine, nor the greatness of his miracles, were a sufficient counterbalance to the lowness of his condition and descent. They who attached themselves to Him, were persons of no rank ; none of the rulers believed on Him ; but illiterate fishermen only followed Him. He owed much to the kindness of others : and, while He went about doing good, had not a place where to lay his head. All these circumstances, not only left Him destitute of the
comfort,

comfort, respect and ease, which rank and affluence afford; but exposed Him to scorn and neglect.

The rich man hath many friends, while a poor man, though wise, is not remembered or regarded; but is hated and reproached by his neighbours. This Jesus felt to be his case. It was scornfully objected to Him, that no prophet could come out of Galilee. It appeared sufficient to discredit all He said and did, to ask, “ Is not this Joseph’s son? Is not this the carpenter? How knoweth this man let-
ters, having never learned?” Our divine Master was so sensible of the contempt thrown upon Him, on account of his condition and descent, that He applied to his own case this proverb; “ A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and amongst his own kin, and in his own house.” It is an affecting and striking proof of the prejudice which, on this ground, laid against Jesus, that not the unthinking multitude only were offended with him on account of his connexions and condition, but even a person of Nathanael’s ingenuous

genuous mind and excellent character revolted at the idea of his descent and place of residence. For when he was informed of his name and claims, he replied, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

It must surely have been a trial to the meek and humble Jesus to find, that circumstances of birth, family, and condition, so perfectly innocent, nay, indifferent in themselves, so compatible with excellence of character and powers of genius, so abundantly compensated by the truths he taught and the works he did, should, nevertheless, form so powerful and universal prejudices against him, that they should warp so honest a heart as that of Nathanael, and should prevent the reception and obstruct the influence of his heavenly doctrine and mission.

Where there is a just discernment of things, it tends to provoke indignation, to see men led away by such prejudices; to a generous mind it is painful. Another trial to which our Lord was exposed during his ministry, was,

Secondly,

Secondly, That of abuse and calumny. His words and actions were misrepresented; his character was vilified; and his most convincing works accounted for in a manner not only absurd, but malignant. It was one instance of the rudeness and contempt with which He was treated, that ridicule was employed against Him. When He was delivering some of the most important maxims, and solemnly warning his hearers of the impossibility of serving God and mammon, “the Pharisees, who were covetous, “derided Him*.” When, at the request of Jairus, He entered the chamber where his daughter laid dead, with an evident intention to perform a great miracle, by recovering her to life, on his saying to the minstrels and the people who were exhibiting all the parade and ceremony of grief, “Give place, for the maid is not dead, but “sleepeth;” we are told, that they laughed “Him to scorn;” and, through their ignorance or wilful misconception of his meaning, insulted Him†.

* Luke xvi. 14.

† Mark ix. 24.

His words were frequently misconstrued, and his designs misrepresented. If, with the most benevolent intention, and to fulfil the purposes of his mission, he admitted the attendance of publicans and sinners, and discoursed with them, the pharisees and scribes took umbrage at his conduct, and murmured, saying, " This man receiveth " sinners and eateth with them : " more than intimating, that he could not be a good man ; not considering that the tendency of his converse with them was their spiritual benefit, and that a prophet must address himself to those whom he wished to bring to repentance.

One pharisee, who had invited Jesus to his house, hastily and ungenerously concluded, that He was not a prophet, and had not a knowledge of the characters of men, because He admitted a woman who was a sinner, or of bad fame, to wash his feet with her tears, and to wipe them with her hair.

Because He did not affect any austerity of manners, nor shun the society and intercourses of mankind, but went into company,

pany, and was a party at entertainments, his enemies cried out, " Behold, a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."

Nay, so perverse a temper was shewn towards Him, that it was not softened by the most benevolent, nor awed by the most powerful actions of his ministry. If He healed the sick of their infirmities, and forgave their sins, He was pronounced to be a blasphemer and an incroacher upon the prerogative of God. If He restored a withered hand, or gave sight to a man born blind, because these miracles were done on the sabbath-day, instead of owning with reverence the divine powers which He displayed, these very persons, who would themselves have taken a sheep out of the pit on that day, watched Him with a malignant intention, accused Him of profaning the sabbath, and condemned Him as a sinner.

Could a more malevolent construction be put on his great and beneficent deeds, except it was this, that not being able to deny the reality of his mighty works, they charged him with acting in connexion with

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some

some invisible evil powers. The pharisees said, " He casteth out devils through the " prince of the devils." What name of reproach, what odious title was there, which they did not cast upon Him? He was branded with being a Samaritan, having a devil, and being a deceiver of the people; and this, though when challenged to it, they could not convict Him of any sin.

These calumnies were evidently intended to undermine his influence with the people, and to prevent the reception of his doctrine; that influence which was wholly devoted to the benefit of the people; and that doctrine, in which they could not detect either falsehood, or error, or weakness. Yet they persisted to bring forward their calumny in different forms, and to repeat it when, by calm remonstrance and close appeals to themselves, it had been refuted. This was trying to the meekness of Jesus. It touched his reputation, and shewed the malevolence and obstinacy of those from whom it proceeded. But not in his character only was our Lord attacked, I observe,

Thirdly, That his life was, in various
ways

ways beset. Snares were laid for Him by insidious questions; and it was attacked by acts of violence.

The insidious questions were proposed to Him under the mask of respect to his authority and deference to his wisdom; but with a real design to obtain such decisions as might furnish the charge of a capital crime. The malice of his enemies was, with this view, ever on the watch to take advantage of Him; and was always disposed to lay hold of the most benevolent acts of his ministry, to turn them against Him. The instances of this are various.

When, on entering into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, He met with a man, who had a withered hand, apprehending that his compassion and power would be exercised to remove the man's affliction, the pharisees ask Him, that they might accuse Him of breaking Moses' law, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day?" At another time they brought to Him a woman taken in adultery, referring it to Him, what punishment should be inflicted upon her, quoting to Him the sentence of the

law of Moses; that if He concurred in it, they might accuse Him of interfering with the authority of the Roman governor, who only had the power of life and death over the Jews; or if He pronounced another sentence, they might charge Him with determining against the decision of the law. A teacher of the law, to try his wisdom, asks Him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" "A reply was expected derogating from the excellence of the law, and exposing our Lord to censure and danger on that account*." At the feast of Dedication, the Jews collected around Him, and as if they were disposed to acknowledge his character, if He would explicitly avow it; "they said unto Him, 'if Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.'" Yet, under these appearances of being truly desirous of satisfaction on this head, it is plain they had a bad intention; for, on his indirectly declaring his Messiahship by appealing to his miracles, and calling God his Father, they took up stones to stone Him.

* Bishop Newcome.

The wisdom with which He guarded the profession of the truth, did not preserve Him from their rage.

If they ask his opinion on the lawfulness of divorces, it was to tempt Him; to see whether He would oppose the authority or supersede the decisions of Moses. If they consult Him on the case of paying tribute to a heathen magistrate, it is to entangle Him, under the shew of confidence in his integrity and impartiality; that, if He determine against the payment of tribute, they might accuse Him of sedition; if his opinion were for it, they might charge Him with betraying the rights of the people. In some instances, as in the questions concerning the resurrection proposed by the Sadducees, with reference to the man who had seven wives, and in that of the lawyer, which was the great commandment, there doth not seem to have been any direct design against his life; yet there was an evident intention to confound and perplex Him; an intention to obtain some ground, on which to impeach his wisdom and undermine his authority.

To Him, who saw their wickedness and penetrated into their design, these insidious questions, these captious dispositions must have been a great trial. The eyes of his enemies were ever upon Him, watching, He perceived, for his falling. And, when they accosted Him, with apparent reverence and submission, as an infallible oracle of truth and wisdom, it was to ensnare Him, in some instances, to the injury of his reputation; in others, to the dangers of his life. Our Lord was, thus, perpetually thrown into the most trying situations; 'living a public life in the midst of persons taking all advantages to entrap him;' and endeavouring to draw from Him, in the hearing of those that followed him, by unforeseen, sudden, and difficult questions, answers that might betray defects of wisdom or goodness, or furnish the most serious charges against Him.

They were not always content with acting in this artful, covert manner. Their malevolence, at times, broke through all restraints, and vented itself in rage and violence. On some occasions, as when He
healed

healed a man on the sabbath-day, they
 “ were filled with madness, and communed
 “ with one another what they might do to
 “ Jesus.” Once and again they sought to
 kill Him, before his hour was come ; and
 officers from the chief priests and pharisees
 were sent to apprehend him. At one time
 they actually took up stones to stone Him.
 At length their counsels were so deeply laid,
 and so determinately directed to put him to
 death, that “ Jesus walked no more openly
 “ amongst the Jews.” The danger which
 threatened Him from this fixed scheme,
 arose from the envy and jealousy which the
 great miracle of raising Lazarus from the
 dead, excited in the breasts of the chief
 priests and pharisees. Pride, in a word,
 despised Him ; malevolence not only re-
 jected Him, but laid snares for Him. In
 every part of his ministry, He was the
 “ man of sorrows, acquainted with grief,”
 exposed to opposition and danger. This
 treatment was naturally connected with
 another source of trial, namely,

Lastly, The inefficacy and unsuccess-
 fulness of his ministry. Disappointment

in the prosecution of a favourite scheme is no small trial. The importance of the design, and the labour bestowed upon it, heighten the trial. An object of greater moment could not occupy the mind, or call forth the exertions of any one, than that to which the ministry of Christ was devoted. It comprehended in it the salvation of the human race ; and, in the first instance, that of Israel, to whom He was immediately sent. Yet Jesus, engaged in this most benevolent office, was not successful. He was despised by those to whom He preached, and rejected by those whom He came to save.

Prophecy anticipated the inefficacy of his preaching, and represented him predicting and lamenting it, “ Then I said, I “ have laboured in vain, I have spent my “ strength for nought and in vain.” The text follows an exclamation of wonder and grief at the prospect of the reception which the doctrine of the Messiah would meet with ; “ Who hath believed our report ? “ To whom hath the arm of the Lord “ been revealed ?” The text itself is a prediction

prediction of the disregard and contempt which would be shewn to this great preacher of righteousness.

We read the history of his ministry, and see the prediction fulfilled. For, though He had his followers; though multitudes hang on his lips, listening to his doctrine, and with astonishment beheld his miracles, yet the number of real converts was comparatively small; and many were the awful instances in which men resisted his words. The many particulars of contempt, abuse, and ill treatment, which was his lot, that have been now laid before you, are proofs of the inefficacy of his preaching.

“He came to his own, and his own received Him not.” With what tenderness and pathos doth He lament the rejection of his doctrine, when, at the close of his ministry, coming near the city Jerusalem, and weeping over it, He said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,

“ wings, and you would not. If thou
 “ hadst known, even thou, at least, in this
 “ thy day, the the things which belong to
 “ thy peace; but now, they are hid from
 “ thine eyes.” In similar strains He lamented over the impenitence and doom of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, where many of his mighty works were done; to whom, in particular, many of his heavenly discourses were addressed.

Nay, so far was his heavenly doctrine from leaving suitable impressions on the minds of those who heard it; so far were his miracles from always carrying conviction, the Historian relates, that his own family did not give Him a reception: “ For
 “ neither did his brethren believe in Him.”

We read this with astonishment. It must have affected the mind of Jesus with grief.

It was also a lamentable proof of the violence of the prejudices, which defeated his labours, that “ many” of those who first embraced his doctrine, finding that they were not to expect the gratification of their worldly views, “ went back and walked no
 “ more with Him.”

Those

Those who were convinced of the divinity of his mission, and were disposed to favour his claims, had not always the resolution and consistency to avow their faith in Him. Nicodemus came to Him by night only. And, when “among the chief rulers, “ many believed on Him; because of the “ pharisees they did not confess Him, lest “ they should be put out of the synagogue; “ for they loved the praise of men more than “ the praise of God.” Neither the example of fortitude, truth, and zeal, which He displayed before them, was sufficient to rouse their emulation; nor the sublimity of his doctrine and promises had sufficient efficacy to inspire them with resolution, or to form them to self-denial. They admitted the divinity of his doctrine, but did not yield to its energy.

To the mind of Jesus how painful must it have been to observe, how the fear of man and the love of the world, prevailed over better principles, and bore down their convictions. By every instance of the inefficacy of his ministry, his soul must have
 been

been affected. His benevolence was wounded; his piety wept.

In estimating the effect, which all these trials must have had upon the mind of the holy Jesus, it is an obvious reflection, that the sensibility and generosity of temper which He manifested, must have heightened them. He loved mankind. He sought their salvation. And his ministry was made up of the most beneficent services to their bodies, while it was principally consecrated to their spiritual and eternal happiness. His parables and instructions, and his conduct, on various occasions, were full of overflowing tenderness and humanity. Every abuse, every insult, every ungenerous attempt upon his life, every instance of unsuccessfulness, would be doubly afflicting to an heart so formed and moulded, as was that of the benevolent, compassionate Jesus. May we not conceive, Christians, what He felt, when He remonstrated with the Jews, “ Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of these good works do you stone me ? ”

Yet,

Yet, deeply sensibly as He felt his trials, with what composure, with what temper, did he support them. "He was oppressed; "He was afflicted; yet He opened not his "mouth," in the way of invective or anger. On the most trying occasions, He shewed such wisdom and sedateness, that his enemies were ashamed, amazed, and silenced. What contradiction of sinners He endured! What greatness of mind He displayed! Whatever was done to depress and disgrace Him, it met with such sentiments and dispositions in Him, that his character was thereby exalted.

Thus a survey of our Lord's trials, when "He was despised and rejected of men;" the detail of the sorrows and griefs with which He was acquainted, becomes an useful and edifying subject of meditation. The narrative is affecting, but it is also instructive. We admire the deportment of our divine Master, who, under all situations, is the same meek and humble Jesus, "going "about to do good." Learn we not hence to expect and to meet the like trials. "The
"disciple,"

“disciple,” as He has warned us particularly with reference to the calumny and abuse cast upon his name, “is not above the Master. If men have called the master of the house Beelzebub, may we not count upon it, that so they will call those of his household?”

Yes. Men have acted upon this plan. The best and worthiest characters, those who have been an honour and blessing to the places, in which they lived, have not only been unsuccessful, as was Jesus, in their most benevolent exertions, but have had their good deeds repayed with ungenerous and malignant treatment; their actions have been misrepresented; a false construction has been put on their conduct; calumnies have been circulated against them; obloquy and an odium have been industriously heaped upon them; and, in their interests and reputation, they have been deeply wounded. These trials have, and do, await distinguished characters. Thus the world repays those who would enlighten and reform it. Thus a wicked generation recompensed

pened Jesus, the holy Son of God, the true and faithful witness.

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, the Captain of our salvation, we become reconciled to bear the cross, which He bore before us. We contemplate his example ;—we admire it ;—we feel its energy, instructing us how to act, and elevating us above the injury and contempt, which may be our lot from men.

The subject addresses us, if we have fallen “ into evil times and under evil tongues,” with the words of the Apostle, “ Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you ; but rejoice, in as much as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings ; that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

But, independently, Christians, of any particular circumstances, or any particular evils, we may be called to sustain, in the
cause

cause of truth and righteousness, the contemplation of the sufferings of Christ, and of his temper and deportment under them, is always useful. We learn from it the debt of obligation, the debt of gratitude and love, which we owe to his grace and friendship. We see what He endured in fulfilling the ministry of our reconciliation with God. We learn the excellencies which entered into His character, and, on all occasions, displayed themselves with beauty and glory. We learn the lessons of humility and meekness, to be practised on the common incidents of daily life.

In a word, our Lord hath set us, under all circumstances, a wonderful example. He was ever great and amiable. In all his sufferings, and in all his actions, in his ministry, and at his death, the same; a perfect pattern of the perfect instructions which He delivered. What manner of persons ought we, his disciples, to be! What manner of temper ought we to preserve! Oh! that men may see

see his virtues transcribed into our tempers and lives. And, when He shall appear, having borne his likeness, having been partakers of his sufferings now, we shall appear with Him in glory. Amen.

THE END.



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